


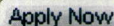
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EPA Takes MagCorp to Task

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BY JUDY FAHYS
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE



Extremely high levels of a hazardous chemical have prompted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to order Magnesium Corporation of America to protect its workers immediately and begin monitoring their health.

The agency issued its directive Friday, days before MagCorp meets with the state Occupational Safety and Health office to discuss safety violations at the plant in Rowley, about 65 miles west of Salt Lake City in Tooele County.

"We are very concerned about worker exposure to hazardous chemicals and are working with Utah health authorities on the situation," said Carol Rushin, assistant administrator for the EPA region that includes Utah.

The company said it learned only late Friday about the EPA's new requirements, such as stepped-up health testing, protective gear, dust control and safety fencing.

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"We are anxious to protect our workers," said plant manager Tom Tripp. "We'll do that."

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The EPA's order is based on tests in January that show workers are exposed to as much as 70 times the "acceptable" level of hexachlorobenzene (HCB). Considered a chemical that probably causes cancer, HCB can irreversibly harm the workers' livers, lungs and skin. Results are not in yet on health tests taken by state and federal officials May 25.

Based on the concentrations found in one area of the plant, toxicologists estimate that, of every 500 MagCorp workers, one would probably develop cancer because of long-term exposure to HCB. In general, an American has a 1-in-4 chance of getting some sort of cancer.

The agency has estimated that trace amounts of HCB exist in about 95 percent of the U.S. population. A byproduct of the magnesium-making process, the chemical used to be widely used as a pesticide.

The EPA found at MagCorp that between 10 and 12 workers would spend at least 30 minutes

of their workdays shoveling HCB-contaminated waste dust. Sometimes clouds of it would drench the workers, who would wear the hazardous chemical on their clothes until their shifts ended.

In a separate, in-depth review of the plant last spring, state worker-safety inspectors identified 87 violations and fined the company \$75,225. While some of those citations concerned chemical hazards, none specifically mentioned HCB.

The company and the state are negotiating a settlement of those safety violations. Neither would comment specifically on the deal, but both sides predicted the final penalty would be lower than what was originally assessed.

The EPA is grappling with MagCorp on three other issues.

In January, the agency filed a \$902 million lawsuit against the company for improper waste disposal. And in the fall, it required the company to take measures to keep workers away from waste ditches that contain cancer-causing dioxins.

MagCorp insists its operations aren't covered under the waste law the EPA cites.

The EPA also is suing MagCorp for allegedly stealing magnesium chloride from the federal lands on the west desert. The case was taken under advisement by U.S. District Judge Tena Campbell.

The company uses mineral-rich brine from the Great Salt Lake to make magnesium and magnesium alloys that are used in everything from soft-drink cans to auto bodies.

fahys@sltrib.com



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